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THEME: RACIAL DISORDERS MELOUN

SPEAKER: Frantisek Turek reporting, with comments, on the racial disorders in Los Angeles, California.

The five-day racial disorders of the Negro population in one district of the city of Los Angeles, California, have not yet come to an end. The very sad balance, which is not yet final, states that in the course of the riots, 31 people were killed, the number of injured was 762, material damage caused by arson amounted to 200 million dollars. It has not yet been possible to calculate the damage caused by the looting of shops. Police arrested 2,255 perpetrators. The Negro riots took place mostly in the Watts district, which is 98 per cent Negro. One-sixth of the Negro population lives in this part of Los Angeles, a city which has a population of over 525,000. The density of the population in Watts is four times higher than that of the rest of the town, and because of this fact, the district is known as a slum, the periphery of a metropolis. In California, of course, whose spaciousness is also reflected in its urban areas, the overcrowded periphery looks quite different from the outside than, e.g., Harlem in New York. Watts, at first sight, looks like a garden town. Detached and semi-detached houses are surrounded by small gardens and lawns, many houses and lawns are well-kept. Nearly 90 per cent of these small houses, it is true, were built before the war and some of

them are already dilapidated. The Watts district, nonetheless, cannot be regarded as a periphery by the way it looks. As to the rest, however, what is hidden from sight, Watts is a periphery. The small houses are too crowded and many of their inhabitants are without work. And those who do work belong entirely to the poorly paid unskilled workers, and if they work as clerks, they are lowest on the scale. The average education standard is low, over 60 per cent of the population have neither secondary school education nor any technical or other training. Watts is also a district of broken marriages and delinquency: in the past three months, thousands of crimes have been committed, a hundred of which were murder, rape, and other crimes. The Negro population of the Watts district and other Negro parts of Los Angeles have complained of conditions. Not by demonstrations -- in this respect Los Angeles and other large towns in the American West were surprisingly outside the prevailing pattern -- but by deputation to authorities, and it was due to their impulse that town committees and institutions were established to see to better homes and schools for Negro citizens, to improvement of the employment situation and effective public security. Progress, however, seemed to be slow and the discontent of the Negro population was not done away with. Under an apparently calm surface, smoldered a dangerous fire.

Last Wednesday, it broke out. Owing to a trifle. A traffic policeman at 2000 hours stopped an automobile whose driver was apparently intoxicated. Questioning was not yet terminated when the driver's mother came and began to reproach him with drunkenness and made him angry. The policeman drew his gun and called for help. A crowd of roughly 200 assembled, the drunken driver was walked to the police station with police assistance, but the crowd did not disperse and the rumor of

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another case of police brutality made the rounds in the district. The Negroes began to throw stones at policemen, city buses, automobiles with white drivers, and the white population in general. The small crowd grew larger and a surge of thousands gradually took control of the whole district. Wherever it went, there was destruction. Windows were broken, shops looted, and whatever was in the way was ruined. On Friday and Saturday, large department stores were set afire. There were conflagrations in 14 places at once, and the lives of firemen who tried to intervene were at stake. The mob shot them down from the roofs. These infringements of the law were led by unknown people. The local population established the fact that they did not know a single one of those who headed the mob. Up to Sunday night, the police force of Los Angeles were not able to control the unrest. Not before the California National Guard had been called in and the Watts district surrounded and occupied by nearly a whole division of policemen and guardsmen was it possible to reinstate law and order in the course of Sunday. Moreover, as later developments demonstrated, it did not last. On Monday, race riots broke out again. The American public is surprised and upset by the events in Los Angeles. Its feelings were expressed by President Johnson; he said that it was tragic that the events were frightful and he warned the perpetrators that they could not enforce their rights and redress of wrongs by violence. On Sunday, President Johnson issued another proclamation, in which he offered Governor Brown of California and the city of Los Angeles all the aid of the federal government that was required; the President then went to the root of things and said that injustice in American society could be removed only by peaceful process. Negroes who took to terror and violence knocked that very weapon from their own hands, which they strive for in their

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own emancipation. It will, naturally, not do to complain of unrest. We must also cope with conditions which are the origin of most of the unrest. It will not do only to condemn violence, but we must also take steps to prevent such violence.

The riots in Los Angeles were condemned by all leaders of Negro organizations in the US. Dr. Martin Luther King, who attended a church meeting in Puerto Rico on Sunday, and who is en route to Los Angeles, expressed his regret that infringements had taken place and agreed that all measures should be taken to reinstate law and order. He said, however, that police could provide only a temporary solution. Roy Wilkins, secretary of NAACP, condemned the riots in Watts and demanded that a neutral committee be established to investigate the causes. Wilkins stated the riots and looting had to be suppressed with all the measures required. Whitney Young, representative of another nationwide Negro organization in the US, also regretted that the riots had taken place, pointing out, however, that he had indicated to Los Angeles officials four months ago the discontent of the Negro population and had warned them that they must not rely on the discipline of discontent Negro citizens. Secretary Wilkins also pointed out that some of the racist elements which came to light during the riots, by chanting slogans and in inscriptions on destroyed buildings, came from the vocabulary - of the Black Muslim organization. This is an organization of radical Negroes who demand strict segregation of the Negro and the white population in towns.

The deeper reasons for the rebellion in Watts -- and in other towns in the northern part of the US will still have to be exposed. At the moment, experts express many views, which are not in accord. It is a fact that, while Negroes in the South

in the past few weeks, had begun to win their century-old fight for civil rights, Negroes in the North, who have had civil rights, demand much more: complete equal rights with the white population in housing, schools, and employment. Some of the demands can be fulfilled -- e.g., in education -- others if the Negroes fulfill the prerequisites. American workers must have technical education to be able to hold many positions -- and technical education is not obtained by short school attendance, as is frequently done by young Negroes. The federal government and the city administration of Los Angeles can give much to the Negroes -- however, they cannot provide the prerequisites for participation in equal chances for all, which American society grants.